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The London Years of Benjamin Waterhouse

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ON the seventh of March, 1775, Benjamin Waterhouse, then a young man of twenty-one, boarded the ship *Thomas* in the harbor of Newport, Rhode Island, the last ship to have left the blockaded port of Boston. Having served an apprenticeship in medicine under Dr. John Halliburton of Newport, Waterhouse was on his way to complete his professional training abroad. He was leaving behind him a country on the verge of armed rebellion against its king. Six years later, in the course of his long homeward journey, he was to hear that Cornwallis had surrendered at Yorktown.¹ Throughout the Revolution, in which Waterhouse, Quaker bred, could have taken no active part even had he stayed at home he pursued his medical studies in London, Edinburgh, and Leyden, taking his doctor's degree at the latter university on the nineteenth of April, 1780. He returned to Newport in June, 1782, to take his place as one of the most learned citizens of the new republic, and also one of its most opinionated citizens, one must add.

During the formative years abroad, particularly those spent in London, Waterhouse experienced much that contributed to his development. The friends and acquaintances he made there influenced him greatly and profoundly affected his later attitudes and opinions. Examination of his London years, therefore, may give us a better understanding of what motivated his actions on his return to America. Obviously, in this brief study, we can concern ourselves only with the more general phases of his life in London and must leave the details of his medical education for future analysis.

When Waterhouse arrived in London, in April, 1775, he was cordially received by his mother's cousin, the learned and philanthropic physician, John Fothergill.² Warmly interested in the American colonies and concerned for their welfare, Dr. Fothergill favored all measures aiming to-

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¹ Letter from Waterhouse to Jared Sparks, Cambridge, April 30, 1838; original in Harvard College Library.

² In the preface to his *Essay on Junius and His Letters* (Boston, Gray and Bowen, 1831), Waterhouse gives a brief autobiographical

sketch, from which many of the above statements are drawn. See also the extensive quotations from a manuscript memoir by Waterhouse, in William Dunlap, *History and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States* (New York, George P. Scott and Co., 1834, I, 162 ff.).

ward the creation of a better understanding between the English and the Americans. Waterhouse later wrote:

Fothergill went so far as to express in print a wish, that the British government would promote *scholarships* for Americans in their universities; and that they would give posts and benefits in this country to such Americans as had studied in England preferably to others, and that the government should permit such youths to pass to Europe in the King's ships *gratis*. Dr. Fothergill thought that this would unite more firmly characters of the first order by their mixing with the British at the universities, and diffusing thus a spirit of inquiry after America, of which country the English were strangely ignorant, and thus cement friendships on both sides; and that this would be a more lasting benefit to each country than all the ships and armies that could be sent across the Atlantic. Few if any Englishmen was better acquainted with the American colonies than Dr. Fothergill.³

Thus Fothergill's political views, as well as family interest and his own benevolent temperament, led him to extend a generous patronage to his young American kinsman.

Dr. Fothergill sponsored Waterhouse's medical studies at Edinburgh, where he spent nine months, beginning in the fall of 1775, and at Leyden, where he matriculated in October, 1778. The years intervening between his return from Edinburgh and his departure for Leyden, and probably some of his Leyden vacations, were spent in London, his chief residence being Dr. Fothergill's house in Harpur Street, Bloomsbury.⁴ Waterhouse gives a pleasant picture of his association with his patron:

Dr. Fothergill practised forty years at the court end of London, was Physician to many of the nobility, and most of its old families, and occasionally was consulted by the first rank in the kingdom. His prudence and delicacy were equal to his wisdom; yet it would be difficult for an affable man to conceal entirely his opinion of the characters occupying different ranks in authority, from one who prudently sought information. Nearly every night, during three years, I, with my transcript Lectures and common-place book, sat at the same table with that industrious philanthropist, from eight o'clock to eleven, both of us exercising our pens in our own way. Had I possessed any of the *Boswellian* ambition, I had the best opportunity of compiling a *Fothergilliana*⁵

From this intimate association, Waterhouse undoubtedly profited greatly. In his writings he lets fall occasional crumbs of moral or medical

³ *Essay on Junius*, pp. 245-246.

⁴ In 1776, while "walking the hospitals," Waterhouse took quarters, apparently temporary, in Gracechurch Street (Dunlap *op. cit.*, I, 171). The Leyden vacations were chiefly spent in expeditions on the continent (see "Sketch of the Life of Benjamin Waterhouse, M. D.," by "R.," in *The Polyanthos*,

May, 1806, p. 77); but we know that Waterhouse was in London in the summer of 1780 (*Essay on Junius*, p. 247).

⁵ *Essay on Junius*, pp. xiii-xiv. Fothergill occasionally employed Waterhouse as his secretary, in transcribing for the press various essays on American affairs (*ibid.*, p. 246).

wisdom derived from his mentor. Inveighing against the pernicious effects of wine — its tendency to create a “deficiency of bile” — he adds: “My venerable preceptor, DR. FOTHERGILL cured such complaints with fresh made *porter*;” then, regretfully, “By the time London porter arrives in this country it contains too much vinegar to be serviceable in these cases.”⁶ And Waterhouse’s *Essay Concerning Tussis Convulsiva, or, Whooping Cough* is not only full of respectful references to Fothergill, but is also dedicated to that physician:

THE AUTHOR DEDICATES THIS ESSAY . . . TO THE MEMORY OF DOCTOR JOHN FOTHERGILL, A MAN VERY LEARNED, WISE, AND PIOUS; WHO, DURING HALF A CENTURY, WAS REGARDED AS THE FIRST PHYSICIAN OF THE FIRST CITY IN THE WORLD: THE FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF HIS STUDIES; IN NAME, HIS PROAVUNCULUS, IN EFFECT, HIS FATHER.⁷

Waterhouse “attended . . . occasionally some of Fothergill’s own practice,” though not, it is to be presumed, such illustrious patients as the heads of the houses of Northumberland and Portland, or Lords Camden, Shelburne, and Mansfield.⁸ These, however, his residence with Fothergill permitted him occasionally to see, together with the prominent men of science who frequented the house of the great doctor. It was here, no doubt, that Waterhouse met the philosopher, Joseph Priestley, of whom he later wrote: “I knew the man before he grew old and sour, if not acrid, the common case with organic bodies kept long in a hot place.”⁹

Not in Harpur Street alone, but also at his Cheshire estate, Lea Hall, to which he retired for two months every autumn, Fothergill gathered about him the ablest physicians of the day. To this place, in the early fall of 1778, Dr. John Haygarth came from the nearby town of Chester to lay before Fothergill his plans for abolishing the small-pox from Great Britain by the use of general inoculation, carefully controlled. Waterhouse was then staying with Fothergill; to the several conferences which followed, he contributed information about the measures taken in Rhode Island to prevent the spread of small-pox. The same information, more fully expressed, he conveyed to Haygarth in a letter dated from Lea Hall, Sep-

⁶ *Cautions to Young Persons Concerning Health*, Cambridge, Printed at the University Press by W. Hilliard, 1805, p. 21, n.

⁷ Boston, Munroe and Francis, 1822. This essay contains (p. 140) another pleasant glimpse of Fothergill: “How often has that excellent physician remarked to me, while riding through the streets of London, and noticing the thin waistcoats of the young

men passing on the sidewalks, which they very generally put on about *Easter* — ‘now we shall have the annual *silk waistcoat* fever.’ ” Waterhouse also dedicated his Leyden dissertation to Fothergill.

⁸ *Essay on Junius*, pp. v, xiv.

⁹ Letter from Waterhouse to Jared Sparks, Cambridge, October 4, 1836; original in Harvard College Library.

tember 25, 1778. This letter was the first of a long correspondence, lasting over twenty years; in the course of that time Waterhouse, who at first opposed Haygarth's theory that the variolous infection was restricted to a narrow sphere, gradually became an advocate of the doctrine.¹⁰

It was John Haygarth who, in 1800, sent to Waterhouse the first sample of cow-pox virus.¹¹ The American doctor's earliest knowledge of Jenner's great discovery, however, came to him from another friend acquired in these London years. John Coakley Lettsom, indebted, like Waterhouse, to the patronage of Fothergill, was an established physician when Waterhouse arrived in London. Lettsom's practice, so pressing that it allowed him no holiday for nineteen years, probably prevented his seeing much of the young American student.¹² It is certain, however, that they met: Lettsom frequently visited Fothergill, and we have Waterhouse's own statement that Lettsom was among the persons he persuaded to sit for his friend Gilbert Stuart.¹³ That their meeting led to friendship is sufficiently established by the cordial correspondence which they carried on for many years thereafter. Throughout the 1790's, Lettsom sent numerous gifts to Waterhouse, or to Harvard College through Waterhouse, including books, stuffed animals and birds, seeds, and a large collection of mineralogical specimens. And in November, 1798, Lettsom first informed Waterhouse of the discovery of small-pox vaccination, and sent him, early in 1799, a copy of the "golden treatise of Jenner."¹⁴

Lettsom was one of those who in 1774 joined with Dr. Hawes to form the Humane Society of London, established to disseminate knowledge concerning the means of resuscitating persons apparently drowned. Lettsom, or perhaps Hawes himself, may have imparted his enthusiasm to Waterhouse, who, in 1782, made an unsuccessful attempt to arouse interest in the formation of an American humane society, and who succeeded in starting such a movement in 1785 with the help of Dr. Henry Moyes of Edinburgh. The "recovery of persons drowned and seemingly dead" was a matter of general interest in that day, and Fothergill, as well as Cullen of

¹⁰ For the material in this paragraph, see John Haygarth, *Medical Transactions*, London, Cadell and Davies, 1801, I, [193]-200; II, [1]-2; III, 259 ff., 319-320, 569.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, I, 211; Waterhouse, *A Prospect of Exterminating the Small Pox Part II*, Cambridge, Printed for the author by William Hilliard, 1802, p. [5].

¹² T. J. Pettigrew, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Late John Coakley Lettsom*,

London, Longman, 1817, II, 53; "R.," in the *Polyanthos* (May, 1806, p. 76), expresses surprise that there is no reference to Lettsom in the journal which Waterhouse kept throughout this period.

¹³ Dunlap, *op. cit.*, I, 172; see also Pettigrew, *op. cit.*, II, 492.

¹⁴ Waterhouse, *Prospect of Exterminating the Small Pox Part II*, p. 77.

Edinburgh and John Hunter, both of whom Waterhouse knew, published their opinions on the subject.

Natural history seems to have engrossed these eighteenth century physicians of Fothergill's circle as completely as subjects more directly in the way of their profession. Waterhouse was not slow in following suit, though his enthusiasm was kept within bounds:

During the residence of several years in the family of the celebrated Dr. Fothergill in London, he acquired there a taste for the works of nature; but has endeavoured to follow the advice of his venerable kinsman, "never to suffer Natural History to supersede Medicine; but to regard it only as an agreeable adjunct to the healing art."¹⁵

Fothergill's own particular love was botany. He planted a large botanical garden at Upton near Stratford in 1762, and a smaller one at his Cheshire estate. Waterhouse visited both these places and wrote an effusive description of the former:

We shall close . . . with an account of the botanical garden reared by that celebrated physician and naturalist, Dr. FOTHERGILL, at the village of Upton, six miles from the royal exchange, London. The wall of this garden enclosed above five acres of land; a piece of water, a winding canal forming it into two divisions. A glass door from the winter parlour gave entrance to a long range of hot and green-house apartments, of nearly two hundred feet extent, containing upward of three thousand four hundred distinct species of exotics whose foliage wore a perpetual verdure, and formed a beautiful and striking contrast in the winter to the shrivelled natives in the cold, open air. In the open ground, with the returning spring, about three thousand distinct species of plants and shrubs vied in verdure with the natives of Asia and Africa. It was in this spot, where a perpetual spring was realized, that the elegant proprietor sometimes retired to contemplate the vegetable productions of the four quarters of the globe united within his domain, where the spheres seemed transported, and the arctic circle joined to the equator. (pp. 114-115)

In these surroundings the beauty of the night-blowing cereus played upon the "delicate susceptibility" of Waterhouse's youthful nerves:

The first time the *Botanist* gazed at this transitory beauty, in the garden of *Fothergill*, and saw its sudden change, it was with sensations he never can forget. He confesses that in the vast assemblage of flowers that adorn the earth, this flaunting beauty caught his eye, and excited strongly his youthful admiration. (p. 226)

¹⁶ Waterhouse, *The Botanist*, Boston, Joseph T. Buckingham, 1811, p. xiv. The page numbers given in the following paragraphs refer to this work.

Through Fothergill, Waterhouse became acquainted with one of the rising botanists of the day, William Curtis, "under whose tuition he herbarized in the environs of London two years in succession" (p. 112, n.). Curtis was at that time and until his death lecturer and demonstrator in the Physic Garden at Chelsea, which was supplied with plants by the regular excursions of a society of London apothecaries. He neglected his own lucrative practice as an apothecary to devote his time to botanizing and, in 1777, to the publication of an elaborately illustrated account of all the plants in or about London, his *Flora Londinensis*. Fothergill at this point withdrew his patronage from Curtis rather than encourage him in what the physician believed to be an extravagant proceeding (pp. 134-135), but Dr. Lettsom gave regular and generous aid to Curtis.¹⁶ As each new and splendid number of the *Flora Londinensis* appeared, Fothergill woefully predicted to Waterhouse that the expense of the work would result in the ruin of its author. The error of these prophecies Waterhouse later recorded: . . . Fothergill, though possessed of the "perspicax oculus" in a preeminent degree, did not then see, that the mild and silent Curtis was imbued with the persevering spirit of Linnaeus. He little thought, that this meek and quiet man would finally effect all that he meditated; and that to the *Flora Londinensis* he would add the *Monthly Botanic Magazine*, and to both a *Botanic Garden*! . . . Under a mild and playful disposition, William Curtis was animated with a persevering spirit, that, in a different walk of life, might have wearied out the patience of a Xenophon, and discouraged Hannibal himself. (p. 135)

Waterhouse goes on to describe in much detail, and as if he had seen it, the botanical garden of Curtis at Brompton; this garden, however, was not planted until after the departure of Waterhouse for America. Other botanical acquaintances whom Waterhouse may have met at the house of Fothergill were Sir Joseph Banks and Dr. Daniel Solander, who had carried their botanizing as far afield as Iceland and the South Sea Islands. Botany was the subject principally dealt with in the natural history lectures which Waterhouse later gave in America; a series of these was published in the *Monthly Anthology* (1804-1808), and in book form in 1811 (see Fig. 2).

Experimental philosophy, in which he attended the lectures of James Ferguson, and mineralogy also occupied Waterhouse, at least briefly, in London. His introduction to the latter subject came through the lectures of the eccentric Emanuel Mendes Da Costa, who was assisted by Fothergill throughout these years.¹⁷ Waterhouse evidently had little lasting profit

¹⁶ Pettigrew, *op. cit.*, I, 162.

¹⁷ *Polyanthos*, May, 1806, p. 76; R. Hingston Fox, *Dr. John Fothergill and His Friends*, London, Macmillan, 1919, pp. 212-213.

Ferguson died in 1776; Waterhouse probably heard a few of his lectures in the summer of 1775.

from Da Costa's instruction, for on undertaking the care of the mineralogical collection given to Harvard by Dr. Lettsom he admitted that he "was less acquainted with that department of natural history than perhaps any other" and had undertaken a course of reading on the subject.¹⁸ Certainly no enthusiasm for mineralogy, but rather a hint of the reverse, appears in the phrases with which he presented natural history to the medical students of Harvard:

Natural History is not introduced here barely to amuse, but with a hope that by cultivating a taste for the works of nature some solid advantage may arise. The American may possibly be reminded, in his researches, that while factitious wealth is dug up from the bowels of the earth, *our* only true and solid riches must be drawn from its *upper stratum*, from thence man receives a reward of his honest industry by a kind of perpetual miracle wrought in his favour.¹⁹

As has been observed, Waterhouse paid due heed to Fothergill's injunction that he not allow natural history to cause him to stray from the prosecution of his medical studies. In London, he walked the hospitals — Guy's and St. Thomas's, he assisted Fothergill in his practice, he diligently attended medical lectures. On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evenings, from seven to eight, October through April of each year, the renowned John Hunter gave "at No. 28, in the Hay-market, a Course of Lectures on the Principles and Practice of SURGERY," in which he introduced "so much of the ANIMAL OECONOMY as may be necessary to illustrate the Principles of those Diseases which are the Object of Surgery."²⁰ Honorarium, four guineas the course. No enterprising student would neglect such an opportunity, and Waterhouse duly presented himself at the feet of the "prince of physiologists," to whom, as he later wrote, he owed "more, than to any public medical teachers he ever heard."²¹ Maxims culled from the Hunter lectures crop up in Waterhouse's *Essay Concerning Tussis Convulsiva*: "John Hunter used to tell us, that a very severe blow on the pit of the stomach, killed the *whole man*, so instantly and outright, that the muscles had not time to become rigid" (p. 54). And further on:

The celebrated John Hunter, was indeed great in every department of our art: a physician, in the original sense of the word, a great anatomist, and a complete surgeon. I have often heard him remark, that excessive purging of children, was a baneful source of that derangement of the lymphatic absorbent system, which

¹⁸ Letter from Waterhouse to Lettsom, Cambridge, October 18, 1799; quoted by Pettigrew, *op. cit.*, II, 466.

p. vi.

¹⁹ Stephen Paget, *John Hunter: Man of Science and Surgeon, (1728-1793)*, New York, Longmans, Green & Co., 1897, p. 102.

²⁰ *A Synopsis of a Course of Lectures, on the Theory and Practice of Medicine, Part the First*, Boston, Printed by Adams and Nourse, 1786,

²¹ *Prospect of Exterminating the Small Pox Part II*, p. 90, n.

leads directly to scrophula; which leads indirectly to consumption. His sagacity here coincided with the opinion of an author, he, most probably, never read; I mean the learned Gaubius (p. 82).

There are indications that Waterhouse's acquaintanceship with Hunter progressed beyond the mere attendance at the lectures. "John Hunter," Waterhouse writes, "once told me that 'he loved to be puzzled, for then he was sure he should learn something valuable.'"²² In a letter to Dr. Samuel L. Mitchill, written in 1825, Waterhouse compares the characters of "John Hunter, whom I knew well" and Samuel Thomson, the discoverer of lobelia.²³ Hunter's dissecting room at his house on Jermyn Street was open to those who attended the course of lectures, and it is probable that Waterhouse there improved the acquaintanceship; Hunter's immense collection of pathological and anatomical specimens, which overflowed the house, must have attracted the young student as much as the demonstrations in the dissecting room. Edward Jenner, once Hunter's house-pupil, was practising surgery in Gloucestershire during Waterhouse's stay in London, and Waterhouse, later to become Jenner's chief disciple in America, neither met him in England "nor heard his name."²⁴

In his *Essay Concerning Tussis Convulsiva*, Waterhouse pairs the name of John Hunter with that of another Scot:

I first learnt the great importance of the mucous membrane from the prœlections of Drs. George Fordyce, and John Hunter, men who reflected honour upon Great Britain. From Fordyce's "symptoms of irritation," and from Hunter's inflamed mucous membrane, "teasing the constitution into an hectic," I discovered the first glimmering of that light, which is now penetrating the dark recesses of the animal economy. (p. 36)

George Fordyce, "a philosophical physician much admired by his pupils," had the honor of Waterhouse's attendance at his medical and chemical lectures in Essex Street every morning "during between two and three years."²⁵ Fordyce lectured from seven to ten, six mornings a week the whole year through, on chemistry, *materia medica*, and the practice of physic. Waterhouse took careful notes, which he later had "fairly transcribed and bound up."²⁶ He found them of service, no doubt, when he became Harvard's first Professor of the Theory and Practice of Physic.

²² Letter from Waterhouse to Edward Jenner, Cambridge, April 24, 1801; quoted by John Baron, *Life of Edward Jenner, M.D.*, London, Henry Colburn, 1838, I, 440.

²³ See "Life and Medical Studies of Samuel Thomson," *Bulletin of the Lloyd Library of Botany, Pharmacy and Materia Medica*, No. 11

(1909), p. 61.

²⁴ Waterhouse, *Essay on Junius*, p. x.

²⁵ Dunlap, *op. cit.*, I, 172.

²⁶ Waterhouse, autograph document, dated February 24, 1812; original in the Harvard College Library.

TRENT: *The London Years of Benjamin Waterhouse*

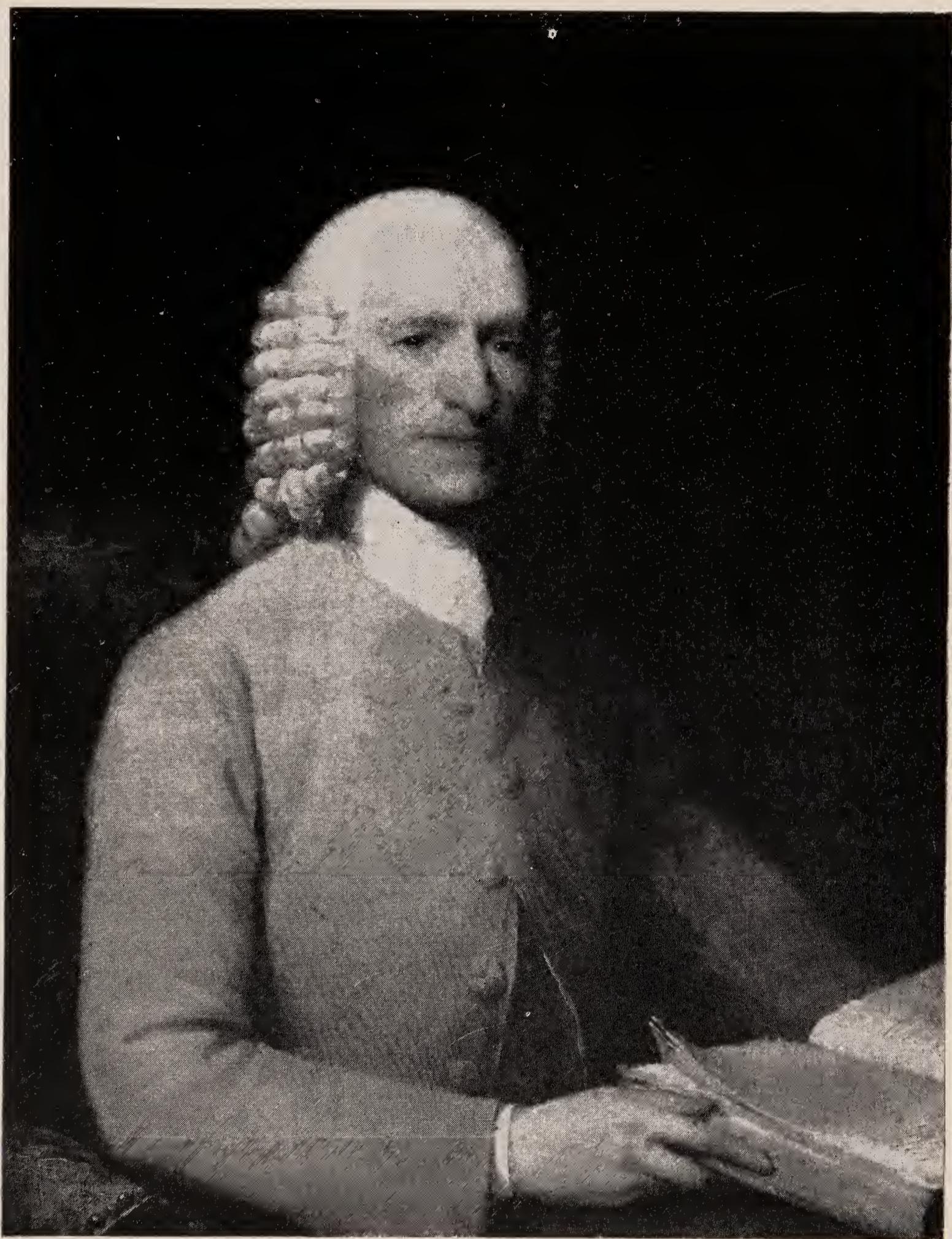


FIG. 1. Dr. John Fothergill, painted from memory after his death by Gilbert Stuart. This portrait is reproduced through the courtesy of The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

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THE
BOTANIST.
BEING
THE BOTANICAL PART
OF A
COURSE OF LECTURES
ON
NATURAL HISTORY,
DELIVERED IN THE UNIVERSITY AT CAMBRIDGE.
TOGETHER WITH A
DISCOURSE
ON
THE PRINCIPLE OF VITALITY.

BY BENJAMIN WATERHOUSE, M. D.

Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences;—of the Philosophical Society of Philadelphia; and of Bath and of Manchester in England; Fellow of the Medical Society, London;—of the Academy of Arts and Sciences, Belles Lettres, Inscriptions, and Commerce, Marseille; and of the National Medical School of France: and Professor of the Theory and Practice of Physic in the University of Cambridge, Massachusetts.

BOSTON :

PUBLISHED BY JOSEPH T. BUCKINGHAM,
WINTER-STREET.

1811.

FIG. 2. The title page of Waterhouse's *The Botanist*, Boston, 1811. The series of essays assembled in this volume first appeared in the *Boston Monthly Anthology*, 1804-1808.

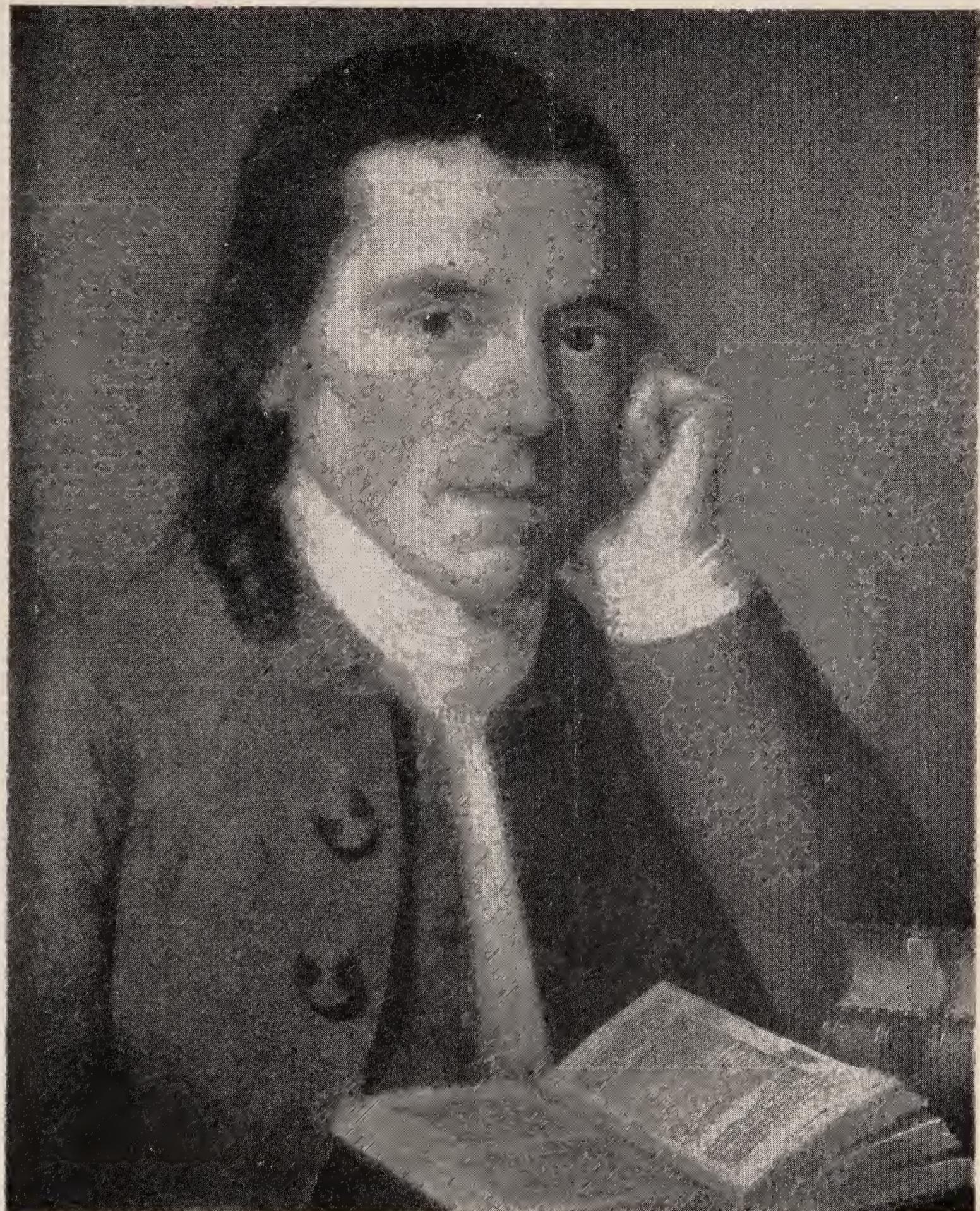


FIG. 3. Benjamin Waterhouse, painted by Gilbert Stuart, perhaps in London in 1776. This portrait is reproduced with permission of the Redwood Library and Athenæum, Newport, Rhode Island, and through the courtesy of the Frick Art Reference Library, New York City.

AN ESSAY

ON

JUNIUS AND HIS LETTERS;

EMBRACING

A SKETCH OF THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF
WILLIAM Pitt, EARL OF CHATHAM,
AND MEMOIRS OF CERTAIN OTHER DISTINGUISHED INDIVIDUALS;

WITH

REFLECTIONS HISTORICAL, PERSONAL, AND POLITICAL,
RELATING TO THE AFFAIRS OF GREAT BRITAIN AND AMERICA,
FROM 1763 TO 1785.

By BENJAMIN WATERHOUSE, M. D.,

MEMBER OF SEVERAL MEDICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL, AND LITERARY SOCIETIES
IN EUROPE AND AMERICA.

As to the Book itself, it can say this in its behalf, that it does not merely confine itself
to what its title promises, but expatiates freely into whatever is collateral.

Harris's Hermes.

BOSTON:
GRAY AND BOWEN.
1831.

FIG. 4. The title page of the *Essay on Junius*. This work, the chief literary effort of Waterhouse, grew out of the political interests of his London years.

Waterhouse's admiration for Fordyce was such that he proposed to his fellow-students that they subscribe a half-guinea each to have a portrait of Fordyce made by Gilbert Stuart. They readily complied; Waterhouse collected the money, passed it on to Stuart, then worried himself into a serious illness in trying to persuade Stuart to begin the painting. The half-guineas were finally refunded by Dr. Fothergill.²⁷

This episode was only one of many connected with Gilbert Stuart that served to enliven Waterhouse's London life. The two had been boyhood friends in Newport. Stuart arrived in London in November, 1775, after Waterhouse had left for Edinburgh. When Waterhouse returned, in the summer of 1776, he found Stuart "in lodgings in York-buildings, with but one picture on his easel." Waterhouse took measures to procure the impoverished painter quarters "between the houses" of two of Fothergill's nieces, and to secure commissions for him. Fothergill obligingly ordered a portrait of Waterhouse; Lettsom and William Curtis sat for portraits, "and so did two beautiful young ladies, sisters; one with dark hair as the tragic muse, the other with reddish hair and light blue eyes, as the comic muse" (I, 172). Nevertheless, Stuart obstinately remained impoverished, levying on Waterhouse's pocket-money, and occasionally being rescued from sponging-houses by his friend. Such behavior was naturally irritating:

With Stuart it was either high tide or low tide. In London he would sometimes lay a bed for weeks, waiting for the tide to lead him on to fortune There was a caprice in Mr. Stuart's character as provoking to his best friends and nearest connexions, as it was unaccountable to the public. (I, 167)

On the other hand, a reproach may perhaps be laid at Waterhouse's own door. Shortly after his arrival in London in 1775, he had become acquainted with the famous American painter, Benjamin West, then historical painter to the king. Stuart came to London with the express purpose of becoming West's pupil, but Waterhouse evidently made no effort to introduce him to West until 1778, by which time Stuart had conquered his own diffidence sufficiently to seek other means of securing the introduction (I, 173-174).²⁸

Despite these difficulties, the two young Americans seem to have enjoyed a constant companionship. Waterhouse writes:

Stuart and I agreed to devote one day in the week to viewing pictures, wherever we could get admittance. We used Maitland's description of London for a guide.

²⁷ This anecdote and the following account of the Stuart-Waterhouse friendship are drawn from Waterhouse's own statements,

quoted by Dunlap, *op. cit.*, I, 162 ff.

²⁸ [Jane Stuart] "The Youth of Gilbert Stuart," *Scribner's Monthly*, XIII (1877), 642.

We found nothing equal to the collection at the Queen's Palace or Buckingham House. We made it a point also to walk, together through all the narrow lanes of London, and having a pocket map, we marked such streets and lanes as we passed through with a red lead pencil, and our map was full two thirds streaked over with red when we received some solemn cautions and advice to desist from our too curious rambles. We were told by some who knew better than we did, that we run a risk of bodily injury, or the loss of our hats and watches, if not our lives, when we gave up the project. We had, however, pursued it once a week for more than two years, and never experienced other than verbal abuse, chiefly from women, and saw a great deal of that dirty, monstrous, overgrown city, containing to appearance, no other people than the natives of Britain and Ireland, and a few Jews, not laughing and humming a song like the populace of Paris, but, wearing a stern, anxious, discontented phiz. (I, 173)

The two enjoyed numerous conversations — on anatomy and botany, no doubt, as well as music and painting, for Waterhouse testifies to the tact with which Stuart adapted his talk to the company in which he found himself. They had painting sessions, Waterhouse serving as model: the Stuart portrait of Waterhouse, now in the Redwood Library at Newport (see Fig. 3), is perhaps one of the results of these sittings; Waterhouse's description of another is sufficiently delightful to make us sincerely regret its loss:

I once prevailed on [Stuart] to try his pencil on a canvass of a three-quarter size, representing me with both hands clasping my right knee, thrown over my left one, and looking steadfastly on a human skull placed on a polished mahogany table. (I, 174)

In 1778, shortly before Waterhouse's departure for Leyden, Stuart painted a self-portrait, which he gave to his friend; it was hanging in Waterhouse's Cambridge home when Stuart visited him there in 1805, and the artist was gratified to find his early work so creditable.

A loyal American living in England while his country was rebelling against British dominion, Waterhouse had occasion for much anxiety: "Medicine and Politics were mixed together in a young, ardent, and anxious brain, far distant from his suffering country!"²⁹ In his patron's home, he was sure of sympathy in his concern about American affairs. Fothergill and many of his associates, though loyal Englishmen, saw the justice of the American cause. Only a month before Waterhouse reached London, Fothergill was collaborating with Benjamin Franklin and David Barclay in an effort to avert hostilities. In his patron's home, also, Waterhouse was in the way of receiving early information on each new develop-

²⁹ *Essay on Junius*, p. viii.

ment; thus, in 1776, he was introduced to Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* shortly after its appearance:

[Fothergill] was family-physician to most of the old nobility, as well as many of the new, and was occasionally called into consultation at the bed-side of the highest in rank and station; by which he had an opportunity of knowing the sentiments of the *prime*, as well as the secondary movers of the political machine, — its wheels as well as its leaden weights. I well remember *Lord Shelburne* calling at Dr. Fothergill's, and leaving a copy of "*Common Sense*," at its very first appearance in London. For several days the good Doctor appeared taciturn and abstracted. Within a week perhaps, he gave me the pamphlet to read, charging me to let no one see it. I read it as a Spaniard or Portuguese would read an interdicted book in the vicinity of the inquisition. It gave to my thoughts a new direction, and occupied my mind day and night. It raised in me a new train of prospective ideas,—glorious ones, be sure, yet dreadful, — "the battle of the warrior, with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood!"³⁰

This infection with Paine's ideas gave way to a tremendous enthusiasm for the letters of Junius, an enthusiasm which remained with Waterhouse for many years; he later attempted to prove the identity of this mysterious writer with the great Lord Chatham (see Fig. 4). Another public figure who attracted the notice of Waterhouse was the celebrated John Wilkes, who on the tenth of April, 1775, presented to George III a remonstrance against the government's adoption of a coercive policy toward the American colonies. Waterhouse reached London probably only a few days after this occurrence; he visited Wilkes shortly thereafter:

I had some personal knowledge of this champion of the people's rights, having had letters of introduction to him in the year 1775, when he was Lord Mayor of London. I went directly from Dr. Fothergill's in Harpur Street to wait on his Lordship at the City Mansion-House. What a contrast, — the *simplex munditiis* of the one, and the *peacockism* of the other!³¹

Waterhouse did not meet Benjamin Franklin, the friend of Fothergill, in London, since Franklin left England on March 25, 1775. This must have been a grave disappointment, for we have Waterhouse's assurance that he had venerated Franklin's name since boyhood: "of great men, he was the one I wished most to see." During his Leyden period, however, he met Franklin in France:

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 246-247. Waterhouse here and elsewhere (*ibid.*, p. 245; letter to Jared Sparks, June 6, 1833, in Harvard College Library) writes that Fothergill told him that Franklin was responsible for the foundation and framework of this essay, while Paine

"finished it in his strong and peculiar manner."

³¹ *Essay on Junius*, p. 66. Waterhouse describes Wilkes' character as a combination of the Roman Regulus with Richardson's Lovelace.

never was I so much captivated by the company and conversation of any old man. His wisdom and his wit were so happily blended as to prove that they spring from the same root, provided they are nourished by a soil of good humor.³²

Though Waterhouse's republican views thus received sympathy in the circle of Fothergill, he found another state of affairs in the streets of London. There he heard his countrymen maligned with "virulent language" and in an "illiberal, anti-Christian style." This was in the spring of 1777, "when Burgoyne's fine army was about embarking for America, in the highest flow of spirits and the utmost glee, like a hunting party with the best omens of a fine chase!"³³

I remember that new maps of its route, just from the press, were as plenty in London, in the hands of American refugees, as pamphlets. They [the army] talked of little else than driving all before them triumphantly from the Lakes to Boston. But, ere the equinoctial season was passed, that well-appointed army laid down their arms at Saratoga³⁴

In the streets of London, Waterhouse saw hundreds of miserable refugees from America, all bitterly complaining against the rebels. Two such Tories Waterhouse knew from Newport days — an English comedian named Simpson, who had practised law in Newport for some years after being rescued from a ship which caught fire in the harbor, and his wife. The couple often visited Waterhouse at Fothergill's house and were sympathetically received:

I forgot their faults when I felt for their sufferings. I cautioned them emphatically not to cast any harsh reflections on the Americans, or their Congress in the hearing of any one of that house, and they followed my advice. Had he not taken it I would have reminded him that he was an English brand snatched out of the fire, by a people who drove him from their land for his ingratitude.³⁵

In the latter part of the year 1778, Dr. Fothergill sent Waterhouse to Leyden "to acquire, as he smilingly said, a little of the Dutch phlegm."³⁶ John Adams has provided us with a brief description of Waterhouse as he was during the Leyden years:

Dr. Waterhouse . . . had resided three or four years, and taken the degree of Dr. in medicine, in the university of Leyden, where I first became acquainted with him. During part of the time of my residence in Leyden, I found Waterhouse and my two sons boarded in the same house. I took apartments in it, and finding him,

³² Letter from Waterhouse to Jared Sparks, Cambridge, June 6, 1833; original in Harvard College Library.

³³ *Essay on Junius*, p. 390.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 357-358.

³⁵ Letter from Waterhouse to the Reverend Romeo Elton, January 25, 1840; original in the New York Academy of Medicine.

³⁶ *Essay on Junius*, p. vi.

though a sprightly genius, very studious and inquisitive, as well as sociable, I had no inquiries to make, but whether his moral character was good, and whether he was a loyal American. As to his morals, I could hear of no reproach or suspicion; as to his politics, though he came over from England, he came from the guardianship and pupilage of Dr. Fothergill, who was as good a friend to America, as any loyal Englishman could be. He had inscribed himself on the records of matriculation in the university of Leyden, *Liberæ Republicæ Americanæ Federatæ Civis*, and his conversation was in the style of a good American.³⁷

This sketch would probably serve equally well for the Benjamin Waterhouse who, in June, 1782, returned to his native Newport. The sprightliness had perhaps been alloyed with a trifle too much of the "Dutch phlegm" prescribed by Fothergill, for certainly his sense of humor suffered in later years; the inquisitiveness, despite Leyden studies in law and history, as well as medicine, continued unabated. Waterhouse was still an enthusiast when he took up his American career, an enthusiast in his own studies and projects, and a man who expected equal zeal from others. In Fothergill's house, the hub of scientific London, he had seen how enlightened men brought their energies to bear on the problems of science and society. He returned to America prepared to do likewise. On the thirteenth of July, 1782, the very summer of his return, seven people drowned in Newport harbor when a pleasure boat upset. Waterhouse, with his knowledge of London's Humane Society and of similar organizations on the continent, published an account of their methods in the *Newport Mercury*.³⁸ He attempted to arouse interest in the formation of a Rhode Island humane society; the attempt failed.

In 1783, the Harvard Medical School opened, and Waterhouse was appointed its first Professor of the Theory and Practice of Physic. His hopes and energies ran high; in a paper which he read before the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in this year, he proposed that the physicians of America collaborate in preparing a history of epidemic diseases, rivalling the great accomplishment of Sydenham:

In laudable exertions shall Englishmen go beyond us?

• • • • •

Times as well as Countries have their wastes and desarts. What period so proper as this, for cultivation — the dawn of peace? — We want the *will* more than the *ability* for investigating the more abstruse parts of nature; and I am persuaded that it is in Phylosophy as in Politics, that mens ambitions are generally

³⁷ *Correspondence of the late President Adams*, Boston, Everett and Munroe, 1809-[1810], p. 572.

³⁸ See the preface to Waterhouse's dis-

course, "The Principle of Vitality," in *The Botanist*, p. [233]; *Newport Mercury*, July 20, 1782.

proportioned to their capacities, for Providence seldom sends a man into the world with the inclination to attempt great things who has not abilities equal to their performance.³⁹

He pointed out that the European world was watching the development of American civilization. West and Copley had shown what American genius could do in art. In science, however, achievement depended not so much upon individual genius as upon the united efforts of many men. To this earnest plea for collaboration, Waterhouse apparently received no adequate response. His failure to arouse American men of science to concerted effort under his leadership was not due entirely to the state of apathy existing among his colleagues. Politics, religion, personal animosities, and jealousy perhaps played a larger part than has been brought out heretofore, but this complicated period of Waterhouse's life must await future consideration.

The knowledge of natural history which Waterhouse acquired in London, he revived for lectures at Brown University in 1786 and 1787, and for similar lectures thereafter at Harvard. His efforts seem to have received neither true appreciation nor adequate remuneration. He conducted an extensive correspondence with his English friends, who generously advised him and supplied him with books and specimens; the specimens apparently got in the way of his fellow professors, and petty differences arose. Remembering Fothergill's garden at Upton and the teachings of Curtis, he proposed to plant a botanical garden at Cambridge, but was discouraged by the prevailing indifference to his plan.

All of these projects took time and effort; no one of them was received with the appreciation that Waterhouse probably felt they deserved, or with the enthusiasm they might have met, say, in London circles. And his practice, too, was a disappointment. He could remember Fothergill, the fortunate physician, consorting with the highest of the nobility and the greatest of the scientists in England. This was what a physician should be — a man of dignity and learning, whose position was secure, whose opinions on political and economic questions, as well as medical matters, were respectfully received, a man sufficiently well paid to take time from his practice for literary projects. In America, however, a physician was something quite different, as Waterhouse informed Dr. Lettsom in 1794: Should I ever execute what I am constantly revolving in my mind, "A View of Society and Manners, with the Natural History of New England," I should send it to England, and publish it there without a name. The fact is, I have no taste for

³⁹ *Of Epidemic Diseases*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1942, pp. 5, 7.

the practice of physic as it is conducted in this country. It is not worth a man's attention. I feel such a mighty difference between transcribing from the great volume of Nature, and practising among the very vulgar, that is, conforming to the whims and nonsense of old women and silly people, that I am sometimes almost determined to renounce it for ever. I know how a London physician gets his bread, but with us it is widely different: a man like me of a weakly frame, addicted to study, is liable to be called out five or six miles on horseback in a severe winter night, and to remain out all night, and to receive (in the course of a year) a guinea for it! We are obliged to be physician, surgeon, apothecary, and tooth-drawer, all under one; and if we are not attentive to small things, and if we do not give consequence to trifles, we are dropped for some one who does. You are spoiled (say some of my friends) for practice in this country, by living so much with Dr. Fothergill, which is in a great measure true — a charming specimen of my intended view of society and manners!⁴⁰

By 1801, the early enthusiasm which had seen America as virgin soil whence energy and enthusiasm might reap great harvests, had sadly waned. Waterhouse wrote to young Mathias Spalding, his erstwhile pupil, then in England: ". . . I rejoice as often as I call to mind the fortunate incidents that have combined to place you in the high road of improvement you are now in. You will learn more in one week in London, than in America during twenty."⁴¹ And in the same year he had occasion to complain to Jenner of lack of cooperation from even the most enlightened of his countrymen:

The characters in America most distinguished for wisdom and goodness are firm believers in your doctrine. They are not, however, over-forward in assisting me against this new irruption of the Goths. I do not wish them to do more than make cartridges, or at least hand them. At present they leave me too much alone, and it is probable will only come to my assistance when I do not *want* them. Had I not a kind of apostolic zeal I should at times feel a little discouraged. The natives of America are skilful in bush-fighting.⁴²

As affairs in Cambridge went steadily against him, these complaints continued. In 1810, he described his misfortunes to Lettsom, and added:

Were I a single man, and without children, I would go to England; if not to live there, at least to die there. You do not knock a man on the head in Britain because he exerts himself more than his neighbors do.⁴³

And in the *Essay Concerning Tussis Convulsiva* (1822), which contains so

⁴⁰ Waterhouse to Lettsom, Cambridge, November 25, 1794; quoted in Pettigrew, *op. cit.*, II, 464-465.

⁴¹ Letter from Waterhouse to Mathias Spalding, Cambridge, October 20, 1801; original in the author's collection.

⁴² Waterhouse to Jenner, Cambridge, November 5, 1801; quoted in Baron, *op. cit.*, I, 473.

⁴³ Waterhouse to Lettsom, Cambridge, May 8, 1810; quoted in Pettigrew, *op. cit.*, II, 485.

many references to the London physicians Waterhouse had known, London is described as "the first city in the world, where physic, including surgery, is more cultivated, and more honored, and better rewarded than in any other city that is, or ever was" (pp. xiii–xiv, n.).

Lest it be supposed that Waterhouse unduly exaggerated the difficulties of his position, the evidence of another, more distinguished, American physician may be presented. In 1786, Benjamin Rush, who also had known London and the circle of Fothergill, wrote to Dr. Lettsom:

You have suggested a number of excellent hints for the improvement and extension of knowledge in America. But, my friend, who shall undertake to carry such hints into execution? Philosophy does not here, as in England, walk abroad in silver slippers; the physicians (who are the most general repositories of science) are chained down by the drudgery of their professions; so as to be precluded from exploring our woods and mountains. Besides, there are not men of learning enough in America as yet, to furnish the stimulus of literary fame to difficult and laborious literary pursuits. I have felt the force of this passion; Alas! my friend, I have found it in our country to be nothing but "avarice of air."⁴⁴

By virtue of his long period of arduous study abroad, Waterhouse was able to place before his students at Harvard the choicest medical knowledge of Europe, and to point their way in paths of study outside the province of medicine. He was prepared to devote himself completely to the academic life, but his professor's salary was inadequate; to live he had to practice, and practice for the American physician of those times was drudgery. With drudgery he could not be content: he had lived too long in the house of Fothergill, and knew too well how a physician should live. This brief review of Waterhouse's London years leads us to the conclusion that his experiences abroad incapacitated him, in a sense, for the life he had to lead at home.

⁴⁴ Rush to Lettsom, Philadelphia, October 26, 1786; quoted in Pettigrew, *op. cit.*, II, 428.

